



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Energy Security; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Central Asia; Russia ; Turkey

RUSSIA'S QUIET AIDS CRISIS

Russian authorities are suppressing data about the extent of HIV infection in their country. At least one percent of all Russians – and roughly 3.3 percent of Russian men in their late 30s – are now infected with the virus, but the true infection rate cannot be determined because too many regions choose not to collect medical data on the epidemic. According to AIDS activists, a mentality of "if there are no numbers, there is no problem" permeates the Russian federal bureaucracy, and some have been labeled "foreign agents" for their attempts to expose the problem. According to Iskander Yasveyev, a sociologist at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, the Republic of Tatarstan presents a particularly troubling example of this trend: when official medical data showed that certain districts' infection rates were quickly outpacing the country's average, the Tatar government removed all online data to mask the severity of their looming health crisis. (*Window on Eurasia*, October 9, 2018)

THE HIGH COST OF CROSSING THE KREMLIN

A recent exposé in the *Wall Street Journal* has detailed the mysterious and tragic saga of Nikolai Glushkov, a Russian émigré living in London until his death earlier this year. Along with Boris Berezhovsky and Badri Patarkatsishvili, Glushkov had been one of three formerly powerful oligarchs who helped Vladimir Putin come to power before he turned on them and forced them into exile abroad – and who later died under suspicious circumstances. Glushkov's enmity with the Kremlin arose during his time managing national air carrier Aeroflot on Berezhovsky's behalf in the 1990s. During his time as deputy director of the airline's finances, Glushkov attempted to crack down on internal corruption, modernize its practices, and help the company turn a profit after years of serving as a front for the country's security services. His efforts earned him FSB death threats and a politically motivated campaign of persecution in which a Russian court froze his assets and sentenced him to jail on trumped-up charges of fraud and money laundering.

After his release in 2004, Glushkov moved to London, but the harassment followed him abroad. After Aeroflot filed a civil lawsuit against him in a London court in the mid-2000s, he began to plan an active legal counter-offensive. The *Journal* writes that, at the time of his death, Glushkov had been meticulously preparing a court case that would expose Aeroflot as a security services front and vindicate himself. However, the night before his first court hearing, he was found strangled to death by his own dog's leash, and his killers have not been found. While Aeroflot dropped its case against the deceased man and was forced to pay \$3.9 million in legal reparations to his estate, the deaths of Glushkov and his fellow oligarchs-in-exile send an unmistakable message to other Putin enemies that they too may one day face lethal consequences for running afoul of the Kremlin. (*Wall Street Journal*, October 10, 2018)

NEW ENERGY TIES TO TURKMENISTAN

Are tensions easing between Moscow and Ashgabat? A years-long energy spat between the two countries dates back to 2016, when Russia's state-owned Gazprom halted its natural gas purchases from Turkmenistan, crippling the country's development plans despite a bilateral agreement committing both nations to economic cooperation through 2028. Now, however, Russian officials are attempting to minimize the rift – and to move beyond it. Gazprom head Alexei Miller has called the lapse a mere "commercial pause," and on October 9th told the Turkmen press that natural gas purchases from Ashgabat may resume by the end of this year. Moreover, according to Miller, there is now interest in new bilateral processing and chemical projects between the two countries as well.

Turkmen officials are singing the same tune. Just before Miller's announcement, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov raised the prospect of rapprochement in a call with Vladimir Putin, suggesting prospects for bilateral economic cooperation beyond energy in new sectors like transportation and telecommunications. (*Eurasianet*, October 10, 2018)

RUSSIA'S DISMAL DEMOGRAPHY, CONTINUED

New demographic data is painting a bleak picture for Russian life expectancy, notes Russia expert Paul Goble. The World Bank's latest *Index of Human Capital Study* has found that only 78% of Russia's current 15-year-olds will survive to age 60 – a figure on par with data for Afghanistan and Sudan, and well below the life expectancies for the same demographic in the United States or China. Some Russian experts have disputed the accuracy of the World Bank's latest finding. Yet Anatoly Vishnevsky, who heads the Moscow Institute of Demography, confirms that overall Russian life expectancy has been buoyed by improvements to infant and child mortality rates, but that suicides, alcoholism, and health challenges keep adult mortality rates much higher today than they were even in the 1960s. (*Window on Eurasia*, October 12, 2018)

ORTHODOX CHURCH SPLIT REVERBERATES ABROAD

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church's quest for independence from Moscow has succeeded, but Russian opposition to the move remains strong - while the conflict itself has increasingly gone global. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul has reportedly decided to support Ukraine's request for self-governing status, to which the Russian Orthodox Church has vowed to respond "in kind and toughly." Patriarch Kirill, the Russian Orthodox leader, publicly expressed his hope that the Church "finds the strength to overcome hardships" and "stay united." (*The Moscow Times*, October 13, 2018)